

# A Hundred Years of Social Work in the Philippines: *Roots and Heritage*

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MA. CORAZON J. VENERACION

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## Introduction

As the Philippines celebrated the centennial of its declaration of independence from Spain (1898-1998), so did the incorporation of the Philippine Association of Social Workers celebrate its golden anniversary (1948-1998). It would now be instructive to look back at the roots and manifestations of social work in the country. After all, the beginnings and historical developments of professions are today indispensable for understanding the issues facing the country.

Through the decades, social work has evolved not merely in terms of simple definition or scope, but in actual forms and practice, depending on the changes in society's political, economic, and cultural structures, as well as on the influences that filter in from the international community.

One of the influences from the international community that came to the Philippines is the concept of "indigenization". The term became popular in the Philippines, as a reaction to the western educational curriculum and literature that dominated the Philippine schools. As Frances Yasas (1973) once said: there is only one way to make social work relevant – "Indigenize".

Walton and El Nasr (1988) noted that the term indigenization first came out in 1971, with the UN mandate that social interventions be made appropriate to the host country. They say knowledge-building is a process, that consists of stages starting from transmission, indigenization to authentication. Transmission which occurred after World War I, is practically an imitation of western models, presuming the universality of social work concepts. But for developing countries at least, Waldon and Nasr foresee that, there will be more authentication than indigenization, in the synthesis of these last two stages.

The practice of authenticizing means identifying "genuine and authentic roots in the local system which will guide future development in a mature, relevant and original fashion. The drive to build knowledge and develop practice models comes from within a country, "as a response to social conditions and needs, and also to the particular patterns of economic and social development" (Ragab, 1982; In Walton and El Nsr, 1988).

In this paper, it is problematic whether "indigenization: a stage precedent to and a term more popular than authentication, is at all necessary." To indigenize, in contrast to authenticize, means to adapt imported ideas to local needs and conditions. Even as it addresses the criterion of appropriateness to a certain milieu, still, the term connotes a transfer of ideas from the west, where the universal social work knowledge began in English language. Therefore to authenticate rather than indigenize, social work local practitioners will have to depend on the use of the native language. This our local social science theoreticians (e.g. Filipinologists Covar and Salazar; Enriquez, though not in Filipino) have done; but that can be hardly said of social work theoreticians.

By dewesternizing, local social workers assert their capability to break away from the original borrowed knowledge from the West. Essential to social development, dewesternization puts identity and consciousness at the center of development efforts. Dewesternizing means going through a transformative process of empowerment and strengthening the traditional, and natural capabilities as well as the resources of the people in a given society. In this context, indigenization means an encounter between a native and foreign culture; and the term denotes a research methodology, a form of triangulation in field research. (Veneracion, 1999)

At the core of practice in the Philippines are concepts that had already been shaped locally in response to environmental demands and historical experiences. This paper intends to (1) present a semantic approach to understanding social work in the cultural and historical contexts; (2) scan four (4) methodological frameworks in local social science theory-building and how they can apply specifically to social work's own theory-building; (3) to review Philippine social work heritage, as one of constructing social work practice models in the academe and in media; and finally (4) to outline a framework of discourse for social work knowledge-building, as part of reconceptualizing social work for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The researcher's central task is to find the type of social work that is backed both by a genuine and progressive theory. When practiced, the theory should reveal itself to be truly responsive to the needs of society and the people.

In that sense, responsive means social work theory does not only convey some solutions to the people's immediate needs; but, also it provides a perspective of long term goals and resolutions. By sticking to this task, the researcher furthers the people's interest. The theory then becomes a liberating instrument for positive social change.

The success of dewesternization hinges upon the choice of methodological theories of research and development: the positivist-empiricist, the interpretative-phenomenological and critical-transformative. When practiced, certain theories are limited by the way social realities are perceived, and by extension how these realities should be responded to. Perception guiding action, these traditions hold the social worker back from direct participation in the name of objectivity and universality. Verifying perceptions cast doubts on the correctness or "aptness" of the assistance that practitioners wish to provide. (Bautista, 1985; Pease, 1991)

However, the 3<sup>rd</sup> or critical theory of social work advocates more action and real involvement. It is premised on the practitioner's appreciation for people's critical awareness and participation in the making of social realities, a just order and peace. The critical theory evokes the critical empowerment of people. Thus, the critical practitioner promotes the capabilities of people to study their own conditions, identify their own problems and solutions, and to manage, generate and use their own resources, notwithstanding available external assistance. (Ibid.; Johnson 1992; Devore & Schlesinger, 1987)

## **The social work orientation in our language**

Our barangays speak of the language of helping others within and outside of the immediate families: *awa*, *damay*, *malasakit*, *kawanggawa*, *palusong*, *batares*, *tulong*. These are *taal* (pure or already there) expressions of desire or acts of helping others in varied aspects and stages of life. These are voluntary responses to needy persons and situations, either at critical times, or as natural patterns of community life. Social practices of helping manifested the Filipino social self long before the coming to our shores of Islam, of Spanish conquistadors and of American colonizers. Helping others was a natural thing to do. We did not need an office, call it bureaucracy, to help others.

But the Muslim and the Spanish religious lent an institutional meaning to the social practice. People helped through the church and performed religious, and charitable work. Among the Muslims, people are obliged to perform *zakat* or *sadaqah*, the giving of alms. Among the Spanish, the *obras*

*pías, caja de comunidad, asilos, hospicios, Gota de Leche*, orphanages, and other religious institutions organized their charitable activities through the church and the state bureaucracy.

When the Americans came, they sustained the institutional terms through the religious, civic organizations (e.g., the Red Cross, Boy and Girl Scouts, men and women's clubs) community chests and councils, and more children's institutions, among others. They also introduced a theoretical basis for helping, and sent government *pensionados* to the U.S. for studies in social work and study tours of international civic organizations with Philippine chapters. (For examples, see Martínez, Escoda, Silva, Laudico, etc. in the Philippine Social Work Encyclopedia, 1970.)

By a historical accident, relief and welfare came to be associated with social work. Republic Act No. 1, 1946 mandated the appropriation of the sum of Php 1,000,000 for relief and rehabilitation of indigent victims of war (de Guzman, 1977). This law launched the conditions for the organization of a government bureaucracy for material resource provision. The same law gave birth to the simplistic understanding that social work and social welfare are one, when in fact they are not.

Social work is only one among the many professions that work toward people's well-being. But then images blur as in taking social welfare more as an intervention than a goal. Even a young profession gets refined in the changing seasons of grace and crisis. Social work education, the media, national and local events, people's experiences with government and non-government interventions, the professional association's aspirations and assertions, etc. — all these contribute to the making of social work images.

In 1948, seven Filipina social workers, all trained abroad, marked their group identity with the formation of a professional association in the Philippines. The Social Securities and Exchange Commission registered them as the Philippine Association of Social Workers, Inc. The incorporation papers refer to the formalization of an institution. The national association's objectives were not simply for membership solidarity and practice standardization, but also to work for a better professional image, and more sympathetic support of and effective action for social welfare.

But how, it may be asked, have the social workers fared in their service to the nation? Social work as a discipline has always been part of the national scene. Whether in the background or in the sidelines, it is attached to the general workings of society — the relations fostered between state and civic institutions, between the public and private sector, and the personal connections between and among individuals.



From the ruins of World War II, natural and man-made disasters, neo-colonization, economic and political upheavals, the social work profession has cleared various paths in the mainstream of national development efforts. However, schools of thought and the methodology guiding teaching and practice, have largely remained tied to Western conceptualizations.

The broad public understanding of social work as a scientific discipline has also been circumscribed. It has been taken to mean alternatively as plain charity/religious work, applied sociology, social engineering, emergency material/financial assistance, political tool, counter-insurgency, or social welfare, apart from a professional service.

In my research and community extension, I have met people in far-flung barangays who identified social workers with the "SWA", or Social Welfare Administration, a government organization during the 50s-60s. In those times, the SWA measured poverty response by *gantas* of rice and number of canned goods for relief during disasters. As late as in the 70s, some people also called them simply "social": for whom mothers prepared for their visits. (Foster Parents Plan, Inc.; as told by T. Viernes, R.S.W. Bulacan). Has Philippine society moved social work forward and identified the practitioners beyond these limited connotations? What liberating and/or dependency elements of social work do the public perceive?

## **Tensions in the Profession**

But to pursue the line of social transformation within the profession is to engage in debates and tensions emerging from the practitioners' theoretical and methodological positions. At a time when the economic crisis hits the nation hard and the number of people who need help grows exponentially, to choose and to decide on direct, participative action becomes almost a professional mandate. What are the options, if any are there for the social work practitioners?

The meaning of social work largely depends on the social worker's position on such issues as:

- Self-reliance vs. dependence on authoritarian leadership.
- Academic vs. field orientation
- Rural vs. urban practice.

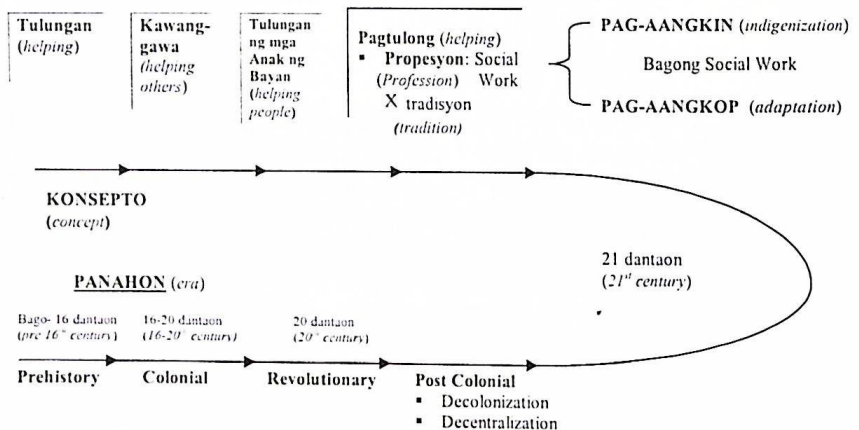
- Marginal social intervention vs. special case as target population.
- Formal education vs. folk knowledge and development education.
- One-shot dole-out vs. developmental (by stages) assistance versus capability building.
- Educated social workers vs. media created “social workers”.
- Professional vs. para-professional vs. volunteers training.
- Integrated vs. specialized, methods-bound practice.
- Institutional vs. community-based practice.
- Modern or western vs. culture-validated knowledge.

But how does one arrive at knowledge in this or that position?

Concepts and theories of personal and social change are developed in order to facilitate and hasten the process of social transformation. These are formulated in the process of change— and as such, the process is active. The state of knowledge in a given profession is built at a juncture of a nation’s history. Social work theory and practice, thus evolves in the encounter between native and foreign ideas.

#### Diagram A

**Transpormasyon ng Teorya at Praktika ng Social Work sa Konteksto ng Pagtulong sa Pilipinas**  
(Transformation of the Theory and Practice of Social Work in the Context of Helping in the Philippines)



#### Direksyon ng Tulung:

- ↔ Magkabilang Panig (mutual)
- Isang Panig Lamang (one way)

#### Pananda (symbol):

- Kaalamang Propesyonal (Social Work Theory and Practice)
- X Kaalamang-bayan (Folk Knowledge)

## Local Theory Building

There are developments in Philippine social sciences, from which social work's own theory building may be connected. Four of these theoretical foundations are cited here for their contribution to the development of Filipino analytic structures. After these four discussions, social work's own heritage of knowledge construction will be discussed. After all, social workers' also theorize for themselves.

Developments in local theory building have gone beyond mere indigenization. The most known and taught structures of analysis are here compressed in four main categories: (1) *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*; (2) *Pantayong Pananaw sa Kasaysayan*; (3) *Filipinolohiya*; and (4) *Pandanggo sa Ilaw, sa agham pampulitika*. These four perspectives born and grown in allied social science disciplines contribute to the formation of a social work theory that points out directions beyond indigenization. As the theorists become more critical of practice or what they do, they may come to realize that they have transcended the limits of indigenization.

The first, *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, is closely identified with Enriquez (1992), who defines *sikolohiyang Pilipino* as not simply a matter of translating Filipino psychology, but by itself "the embodiment of the scientific study of ethnicity, society, and culture of a people... and the formal application to psychological practice of knowledge rooted in a people's ethnic heritage and consciousness. In *sikolohiyang Pilipino*, culture is central. What is scientifically valid or "true" is also culturally "appropriate."

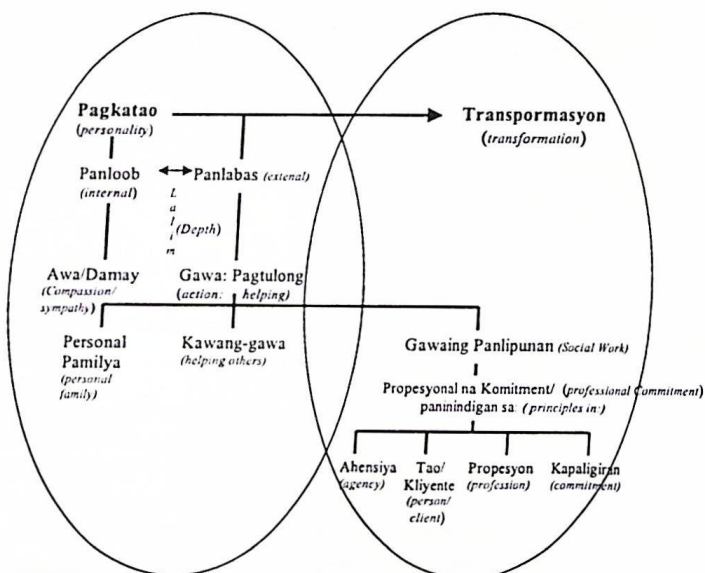
Applying the principles of *sikolohiyang Pilipino* in the practice of social work would entail, among others, the investigation of social responsibility, the values in a civil society, and the ways history and culture shape the Filipino psyche in altruism.

*Pantayang pananaw sa kasaysayan*, meanwhile, refers to the perspectives applied to the reading and understanding of history, and, by extension, to the national identity. According to Salazar (1991), there are four kinds of perspectives that can be deduced in the reading or writing of history. The first is the *pang-kayo* where the native is spoken to by the foreigner. The second is the *pang-sila*, where the foreigner speaks to another foreigner. In the *pang-kami*, the Filipino speaks to the foreigner (particularly if the conversation is in English). In the fourth, the *pang-tayo*, the historian speaks to a fellow Filipino. Given the *pang-tayo* perspective, as compared to the other perspectives, Salazar poses an important question—for whom do we read and write history?

And so the question may similarly be raised about social work profession: For whom do social workers practice? For whom do practitioners restructure social work theory and practice, and why? The answers to these questions lie in the Philippine social realities that shape or ought to shape practice. Who defines these realities have much to say regarding how social work is defined and how the profession is practiced.

Given the proper context of Philippine social realities, Covar (1993) alternatively uses the comparative method in his analysis of the Filipino personality. He selects folk knowledge that describes the Filipino: *Ang pagkataong Pilipino ay tila isang banga* (Manunggul). *May panlabas at panloob, at higit sa lahat may panlalim*. Instead of using modern scientific concepts, he draws out ideas from day-to-day life. In a manner comparative and metaphorical, he thus creates clear definitions.

**Paradigm: Sosyo-sikolohiya ng Pagtulong**  
(Socio-Psychological Dimension of Helping)



**Transpormasyon:**  
(transformation)

**Ginhawa** (relief from stress)  
**Pagsasakapangyarihan** (empowerment)  
**Pagbabagong-dangal** (dignity)  
**Kamalayang mapagpalaya** (Liberating principles)



Dr. Covar has a lesson for social work pedagogy. He suggests that education is most meaningful when it starts largely from our *pinagmulan* or *pagkakakilanlan* (identity). The process of education can begin to assimilate foreign ideas only after a clear understanding of who we are, where we are and where we are going with what we have.

Finally, *pandanggo sa ilaw* or loosely “dance with the lights” is another metaphor of Philippine political dynamics. (Agpalo, 1964) We see here the public officials and staff as the dancers who have to balance their actions with and through the various interest groups. Political class would make it appear that there are contests when in fact only one really controls the whole process. It is in the *pandanggo* where a kingpin allows whoever he wants to, to rise or fall in the political arena. Of course, one may also use the *tinikling* (bamboo dance, simulating the birds that leap from pole to pole, with rhythm and grace) for comparison in local, political governance.

But whichever, with these metaphors as *bukambibig* (oral usages; utterances), we understand each other readily and almost completely. The dance, as part of our culture, delivers the intricacies of the message: balance the act. Social workers, whether in a government, non-government or people’s organization setting carefully observe steps that tread along political lines. Social work is also political. (Veneracion, *Pagtulong: Gawaing Panlipunan sa Pamahalaang Lokal, Kasong Aralin ng Bulakan*, 1998)

## Heritage

Much of social work theorizing occurs in schools where they are taught and supposedly tested. In the first 25 years of social work in the Philippines, the professionals struggled with the philosophical and scientific attributes of a profession. However, Mendoza (1968) observed as methods-bound the specializations produced in the West, referring to the methods of social casework, social group work and community-organization. These methods continue to be reflected in the examination areas of the board examination (RA 4373). In the last 30 years, slowly and sparingly, Philippine social work began reconceptualizing. Proponents argued for an integrated method of social work practice and called for a halt to methods-specialization.

Social work intervention means an action by a social worker on behalf of an organized group, the state or a collective, in order to identify and resolve a personal or social need, issue or problem. To us Filipinos, an individual’s problem represents a family whose poverty is multi-dimensional. The personal

easily transforms to a social problem. And by and large, Mendoza configured a set of six helping models, useful for helping multi-problem families. Read as role models, these interventions consists of resource provision, mobilizing client resources, counseling or clinical practice, intercessor-mediator, educating the elite, and social advocacy. The configuration revolves around a set of western practices nonetheless, which are adapted to the Philippine conditions.

To Almanzor (in an interview, 1993), the integrated model only reflects how the Western community organization or CO was indigenized. But then again CO practice in the Philippines has not been the monopoly of social workers. Many other development workers have claimed it and have since semantically evolved a kind of community organizing characterized by an action-reflection-action process.

Still, the discussions on the interpreted concept in the local front continued. The "transformative nature of social work" raised the concept of help in its social, psychological and cultural dimensions. Bonifacio (1973), a sociologist and former Dean of CSWCD, U.P., in arguing for an integrated approach to personal and social transformation, stated:

"It is the nature of social work as a professional discipline to address itself to broad and complex issues encompassing the total society. The approach utilized in the profession involves the three levels: the individual, the group and the community. No attempt is made to segregate the three levels. Ideally the whole view should be gestalt approach. The social worker is trained to develop an expertise in the areas of intervention and prevention."

Intervention pertains to an existing problem and prevention, to an anticipated problem or need. From the 70s and on to the 80s, here and worldwide, the Latin American idea of social work as a liberating profession provided an alternative exogenous source to dewesternize social work. The Latin American "consciousness-raising" contributing original concepts to social work practice, has oriented Filipino social workers to own and develop their profession. (Resnick, 1976; Lasan in Resnick)

The Dutch "agology" or the French "animation" are proofs that indigenization and authentization are happening world-wide. (Kendall, 1973 in Walton & Nasr, 1988) But the terms did not gain as much entry as the Latin American "consciousness-raising" into the vocabulary of local social workers. However, the Filipino *pagtulong* is common and understandable throughout

most of the country's diverse ethnic communities, as a social practice. The social work profession is validated only if practice builds upon *pagtutulungan* as manifested in kinships, neighborhood and other network-support systems. (Veneracion, 1995)

And, for Filipino social workers specially, the 1986 People Power, or people's empowerment, became a by-word for strategizing community planning and social service delivery.

## **Philippine Realities as Social Work Contexts**

One primary aim of social work is "to enhance the 'social functioning' of the individual, singly or in groups, by activities focused upon their social relationships which constitute the interaction between man and his environment," (de Guzman, 1971; Mendoza 1981; Palma, 2000). That is to say, if social work intervention is to be accessed, in relation to social functioning in the Philippines, both social work and social functioning will be defined for the Filipinos.

The responsiveness, and therefore the effectiveness, of social work will then depend on how closely its manifestations are suited to the contexts wherein the people live. Thus, it is vital to be at least introduced to the current political, economic, social and cultural conditions of society.

A short glimpse at the situation faced by the basic sectors of society, provides the social context of social work practice. The daily cost of living as of May 1998 was pegged at P342.22 for the entire country and P4,331.23 for the National Capital Region. (IBON Foundation computations based on data from the Central bank and the National Economic Development Authority) With the Asian economic crisis and ecological disturbances, taming inflations, stabilizing the exchange rate, and keeping international rates require complex solutions. Notwithstanding, it is for the social worker to be informed of developments and to dialogue with people within and outside the profession. Social work is focused, bounded yet related with others' efforts. Social work intervention means a lot more when the practitioner is alert for information, coming from local decisions, national developments, and global changes, that relate to clientele and program.

In the labor sector, some 82,839 workers from January to July 15, 1998 were retrenched. This means that 423 workers daily have been laid off since the beginning of the year. There was rampant contractual labor, and based on employment patterns from 1992-1997, only one among every five workers is employed as regular. (Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education and Research or EILER, 1998).



Open unemployment had already reached 13.3 percent (or 4.2 million) of the labor force as of April 1998 compared to 10.4 percent for the same period last year. This means that an average of 2,781 workers joined the ranks of the unemployed each day over the last year adding a total of more than 1 million Filipinos to the 3.2 million unemployed workers of last April 1997. (Ibid.)

Meanwhile, the situation faced by the other 60-70% of the population is no better. Filipino farmers still cry out for land. The monopoly of a few over large tracts of land remain, and as the largest portion of the Filipino people are farmers and peasants, majority of them are landless. Famine and food shortages are direct results of the implementation of farm and crop land conversions into golf courses, industrial estates and subdivisions, commercial, trading or recreational centers. (Nortes, 1992)

According to a report from the Department of Agronomy of UP Los Baños (EILER), the government program that seeks to import 1.35 million tons of rice by the end of 1999 will have a most detrimental effect on 172,500 Filipino farmers and 345,000 farm workers all over the country. The treatment of the labor and agricultural sectors in the immediately preceding discussions are mere illustrations of the situation. True, they are limited because there are still other sectors and sub-sectors that are perhaps in slightly better or even worse conditions. How are these facts and figures observed in the GO or NGO local communities?

A recent study commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (KMU, 1998) says that three out of five Filipinos today feel that the current economic and ecological crises have made them poorer and less confident about finding jobs. The study also said that the Philippines, compared to other countries in East Asia, "has been faring poorly in the fight to reduce poverty." The study noted there had been no significant reduction of the poor despite government's declared policy making poverty alleviation its centerpiece program.

All these are simply an overview of the overall situation of the basic sectors in Philippine society, amidst the interface of *El Niño* and *La Niña* phenomena. These are the reality situations to which social work practitioners must address themselves. With a government framework of political slogans like *Erap para sa mahirap* (Pro-poor President); *Trabaho para sa Pilipino* (A job for every Filipino); *Laban sa pagtaas ng presyo* (anti-price increase); and, *Itatayo gobyerno ng masang Pilipino* (The Filipino masses will build a strong government) - social workers must help themselves



by examining the government's political and economic recovery agenda. Does social work fall in any of the agenda? If we are not there, where are we, and/or why are we here instead? Why can we not be there? Where exactly or approximately should our structural location be? And how do we critically begin (re)locating ourselves?

## **Constructions in Social Work Education**

The limits of indigenization are precisely why social scientists (Salazar and Veneracion, in History; or Claudio in psychology) doubt about its usefulness. More importantly, indigenization at the level of translation is merely indigenizing the western theory. Western thinking still dominates in that it retains its power to define what to connect or adapt to Philippine situation. To seek a balance, we also need to understand the location and making of social work education.

Social work education is part of the process of social exchange. The present education for social work is the product of the struggle between progressive ideas of change. Thus, Philippine education reflects the country's neo-colonial struggle between western influences and native world views. (Almanzor, 198-)

In my own social work formation, I learned social work in the indigenized mode. I argue that the comparative table that follows is not far fetched from other students of my time (mid 60s). This chart, *How I Learned Social Work*, reflects simply a homegrown outlook (for us) vis-à-vis a western one (for them). (See next page for the chart and diagram)

Chart 1

SOCIAL WORK FOR THEM Sa Kanila	FOR US Sa atin
Country's Development Stage when Social Work began Capitalist Industrial boom	Semi-feudal Mainly agricultural
Climate Region  Cold	Tropical Natural Disaster prone Cultural, indigenous communities (upland, coastal, lowland)
Population Served: Population at risk, with socio-psychological dysfunctions	Resettles Squatters Victims of war, natural disasters, social unrest, sexual exploitation, illness
Welfare, as right to Social Services	Welfare as an emergency, temporary aid viz. Well-being, synonymous with quality of life.  Welfare, as issue for fund raising and planning (community chest and councils)

## Periods of Social Work Indigenization/ Dewesternization

CONCEPTS	Context/ Dimensions/ Formation
1950's	
Social Work Definition	"an art in which knowledge of the Science of human relations and skill in relationships are used to mobilize capacities in the individual and the resources in the community... for better adjustment between the individual and all or some parts of his/her total environment." - PASW, 1995. in Report of the Phil. National Committee, July 1960, to the 10 <sup>th</sup> International Conference of Social Work 1960.
Social Work Education	Fields of Social welfare and social work methods, Classroom and field instruction
Social Work Methods	Social Casework, group work, community organization, social administration, social research and social action
Social Work Specializations	Methods-bound; social welfare fields; target population
Medical/ Psychiatric Practice	Team Approach in hospitals and mental health organizations
U.N. Concept of Community Development:	First National Conference of Social Work, 1957 Theme: The Role of Social Work in Community Development
Self-reliance Self-determination	Rural Reconstruction and Development Model/ Interdisciplinary team Approach  Consultants: Filipino Social Workers abroad (Silverio, Wolfe, Martinez)  U.N. Advisers: U.S. Fulbright exchange



CONCEPTS		Context/ Dimensions/ Formation
1960's	<p><i>Social Work redefined- a profession concerned with strengthening the social functioning of target population or clientele in the context of national development.</i></p>	<p>"Science and art"</p> <p>Operations Brotherhood Inc.</p> <p>Community work in Vietnam, Laos, and Sepang Paly, Phil.</p> <p>Community Welfare Center Model</p> <p>Legitimation of the Profession, RA 4373, 1965, regulating the practice of social work</p> <p>Institute of Social Work and Community Development Act, RA 5174, 1967</p> <p>Department of Social Welfare Act, RA 5416, 1968</p> <p>Schools of Social Work Associations (SSWAP), 1966-1967</p> <p>Student's representation in the PASW Board, 1970's</p> <p>Social Action heightened</p>
1970's	<p>Social Development Framework</p> <p>Conscientization</p> <p><i>Social Functioning:</i> level indicates capacity to meet basic, emerging needs and to participate in community development</p> <p>Community Organization Models: Locality development Social planning Social action</p>	<p>Developmental Approach</p> <p>Building Christian Communities Model, Social inequalities and grassroots organizing</p> <p>Wholistic, total family approach</p> <p>Need for Results: Welfare Indicators</p> <p>Community organizing: Integrated method of social work, w/a point of entry and a range of interventions</p>
1980's	Participatory Development	<p>People's empowerment for personal and social transformation.</p> <p>NGOs</p> <p>Networking/ Alliance Building</p> <p>People's Participation</p>
1990's	<p>Globalization</p> <p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Decentralization</p> <p>Local Governance = local empowerment</p> <p>Community practice of Social Work</p> <p>Refugees and Overseas Worker's Concerns</p> <p>Community-based programs</p> <p>Resource generation and management</p> <p>Entrepreneurial competency Development</p> <p>Family as the unit of Service/ Assistance</p>

As education is influenced by changes unfolding in institutions and groups doing social work of some kind or another, so also developments in social work education seeks to influence the world. What social workers do influence the making of social work curriculum. But it is also true that education seeks to influence the world or the workplace if not the workers themselves. And how so? There are propositions that may be gleaned from the critiques of practice and education.

To Kuitenbrouwer (1975), the philosophical dilemma in the social worker's list of tasks is to determine whether or not the social welfare system of which he/she is only a part, is and should continue to serve as "an instrument in the maintenance and development of inequality and an inevitable social order." The dilemma lies on one hand, whether social work practitioners should accept (no matter unintentionally) to contribute to the widening of poverty and human degradation, or should they focus on the elimination of institutional and social arrangements which engender and reproduce social inequality, social disorganization, etc. To crack this issue, social workers would need to develop inquiring, critical and valuing minds, which nurturing is an educational function.

S. Dasgupta (1979) posits that we need a different type of education from the one we pursue today. Why – because we need a kind of social help that will, in contravention to what is happening now, seek to root out the process that creates social injustice. There are Filipino students who say the type of education so badly needed to replace the old, is one that is "scientific, mass-oriented, and nationalist" or SMONE (NUSP).

In the context of social transformation, social work students are expected to learn how to help people to analyze and summarize their own experiences, and to draw lessons from these to support or advance their own causes vis-à-vis other people's class interests. The first step, as always, is education and of education there are variations.

First, there is what is called alternative education. This type of teaching and learning is premised on a view of reality that education is:

"a mechanism for cultural reproduction contributing in two principal ways to social production, or the maintenance of the economic — and its corresponding political — order (Smith). It is a process of knowledge transmission which takes place within a structure of power relationships, through which constraints are operated upon it. The educational system is a power structure transmitting a dominant ideology mainly through knowledge selection, transmission and distribution". (Doronila, 1987)



In this context, there is also development education. Essentially transformative, it is designed to develop in learner participants a new, or even a counter consciousness of their own life situations and the capacity to alter these situations if necessary. In the context of Philippine experience, development education is understood as an integral part of the broader national movement, whose basic unity is for the Filipino people to take at this juncture of their historic struggle, decolonization and democratization in nation-building. (Ibid.)

## **Bases and Standards for Education and Practice**

Looking now for standards, social work is both objectively responsive and scientific if (1) it is based on the people's experience; (2) it responds to the objective conditions of the people, and the objective laws of development; (3) it serves the interest of the Filipino masses, who are the primary movers of a national democracy; and (4) it is sensitive to the objectives of various sectors of the poor in society. (Apit, 1974)

So if there is a space for class-based, community-based or ethnic sensitive social work practice, the social work practitioner describes practice precisely in these terms. The order is: to grasp social work's historic role, and in some instances to negate the education or renounce the class to which one has been born and/or socialized.

## **Media Projections: Professionalization or Deprofessionalization**

Media projections are a way of educating the public. The medial reflect various public understandings of so-called social workers who manage to contribute to various national or local concerns. They also popularize concepts (e.g. social work) that are commonly used in the academe.

For instance, the printing of the face of Josefa-Llanes Escoda, with two other men heroes in the P1,000.00 Philippine currency bill (1991) mirror's society's acknowledgement of her services in the struggle against Japanese occupation 1942-44. A trained social worker abroad, she campaigned for women's suffrage in the Philippines, and co-founded the National Federation of Women's Clubs whose pioneering feeding and day care programs continue to this day. She is an icon of the Girl Scouts of the Philippines. The ABS-CBN televised Bayani Series (1996) has a special feature of her lifestory.

Even the recognition of self-proclaimed social workers such as socialite and philanthropist Rosemarie "Baby" Arenas (political campaign ad, 1992), and actress Ruffa Gutierrez (news item), and hairstylist Ricky Reyes (T. Locsin, the Assignment, Channel 2, June 26/00) are signs that the term social worker has other claimants. A former DSWD Secretary in her time referred to herself "as a physician and a social worker...." (PCSO TV Ad). In addition, a journalist described a 1999 Palanca winner, writer Roy Loreda, as a social worker who worked with PEPE (People's Empowerment through Popular Education). But there is also Corazon Alma G. de Leon, former Civil Service Commission Chairperson, and former DSWD Undersecretary and Chair of the Mt. Pinatubo Commission. She is a social worker by training and work experience.

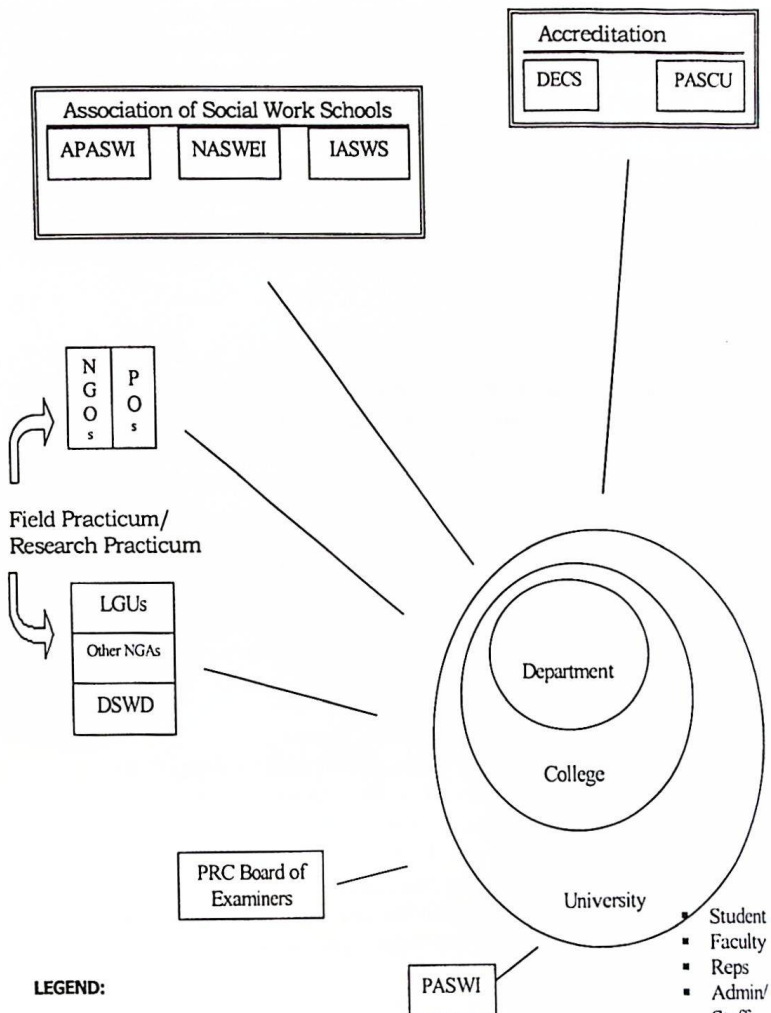
Given these images as examples, the media indeed display a spectrum of perceptions of who are the social workers in this country. Media use the label to apply to showbiz personalities, philanthropist, popular educator, and public officials, regardless of social work education and training. The personalities commonly show their participation in various forms of social interventions not necessarily social work. The social practice of helping people stays at the root of it all, differing only in background and context of the helping person.

Licensed social workers normally practice their profession in varied structures or relatively open settings, whether government, non-government or people's organizations. For and with a wide range of disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable population groups, practitioners pursue the quest for a better quality of life... a task that makes them like any other good citizen, well meaning politician or dedicated professional. They also occupy positions either directorial, managerial, or front line.

As a class of social work intervenors, they deliver direct and indirect services. Yet, the proper niche of social workers in the struggle for social transformation remains to be defined, lest other thinkers and knowledge producers define the self-niche for them. The professional mandate calls for constant dialogues and self-critiquing toward a collective professional image construction.

As a technical term, social work professionalization refers to standardization in education and practice in ways that meet the norms, ethics, and sanctions defined by the Professional Regulation Commission, the professional association of social workers, the social work schools, and social welfare and development agencies. (See *Diagram B: The World of Social Work Education*)

**Diagram B: The World of Social Work Education**



- Student
- Faculty
- Reps
- Admin/ Staff
- Alumni

In professionalizing the provision of services, it is not always clear whether the practitioner uses a theory, or for that matter whether he or she indigenizes with an imported theory. (Pease, 1989) What is critical is the practitioner's exposure and exchange with various types of development workers, and of course colleagues. Social welfare and development work is not the monopoly of social workers. As Apit (1924) says: "Any effort designed for human development should be in some way a contribution to the development of the national as well as the international whole. Or else, it is objectively not a development effort." He ascribes professional involvement as one enters into an alliance with other professionals, institutions and movements.

## Practice Relevance

Some criteria for social work practice modeling aid and direct social workers in building knowledge for developing countries like the Philippines, etc. Three major criteria are mentioned here, namely, people's participation, socio-economic contexts and an ideology of service for the greater good.

The people's input to a definition of goals and processes is recognized as an important element of practice model-building. The model positions the change agent (the social worker) and the target of change (the people) on a partnership basis, and it puts the question of relevance squarely on the people. The definition of the problem, need, or process of meeting the need is an area where the people dominate, in juxtaposition with an agency's target goals and objectives.

The premises of democracy, e.g., economic sovereignty and political independence are goals yet pursued in many Asian countries. If Asian social work is to build its theory and practice around ideas of social reform and change strategy, the professionals have to develop a clear understanding of the current economic, political and cultural realities surrounding diversity and social justice. The limitations of reformism can be handled, and the handling must begin by locating the reform strategies within a particular socio-cultural context. (Gelper in Jayasuriya, 1979)

The growth in social work ideology in the 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries continues as a reaction to the intellectual dependence on colonial or western social science models, which dependence continues long after these countries already gained their political independence. Jayasuriya (1979) points out that social work is saturated in the ideology of man as a universalistic theory. But nations show vast unequal rates of development. Social work roles are thus properly redirected when these roles are transformed to meet the appropriate contingencies such as gross inequalities.



It is said that social workers use words that carry certain ideologies. For example, the words "self-determination" or self-reliance" convey an understanding of social realities and their evaluations. Here is a paradox in social work praxis, because a balance of perspectives does not always exist. A dilemma for the social work practitioner lies in determining which dominates – the social need or the individual need (or the need of a few).

In this sense, the social worker can only aspire that his/her work can be truly relevant if it contributes directly or indirectly, to serving larger units (the greater good).

## A Proposed Framework of Discourse in Social Work

The review of discourses in the social sciences in general and social work in particular altogether suggests a number of take-off points toward transforming the practice of social work in the Philippines; such as the (1) decolonizing intent to build upon the indigenous; (2) pursuit of relevance in the context of a nation's history and state of well-being; (3) critical and selective transfer of knowledge/technology; and (4) liberational and empowering methodology. To develop the indigenous, first search, strengthen and enrich the traditional and local sources of knowledge; second rethink social work available knowledge, then third relate knowledge to recent trends regional and global.

Social work in the Philippines can be assessed using at least three basic frameworks: the historical framework, the socio-cultural context, and a kind of framework for a data base which can be utilized to serve the processes of critiquing and rethinking, and developing thereby a local theory and practice of the discipline.

### 1. Historical Framework

Social work history in the Philippines gives character to local practice, only as the profession unfolds as part of national and international developments. Professional social work was practically non-existent during the colonial period, practiced only in the form of religious works of charity and civic efforts. Through education and practice, the pre-colonial social practices of helping continues and discontinued in some ways. These continuities and discontinuities therefore demand the attention of the Filipino scholar. Social work as a discipline is there to enrich the social world where the practitioners were born, nurtured and are now cast to play their roles in nation-building.

Historical narratives about the nation and the people emphasize the problems of decolonization identified in the structures, habits, and practices of social work as a profession. In this regard, selected works of revolutionary writers, like Jacinto and Mabini, Claro M. Recto, and Jose Ma. Sison; and millenarian scholars like Reynaldo Ileto and Prospero Covar, to name only two, can be reviewed for their contribution to the thinking on social transformation in the Philippines. Their works have much to say to strengthen the Filipino character of social work.



Social work history can be enriched and rewritten using not only archival materials, but also with textual analysis of newsclips and media projections; writing biographies and life stories of social workers, national and local heroes thru the decades; focus group discussions on world views of social workers and clients with regard to their perceptions of help that empowers; workshops on the teaching of social work history; analysis of shifting trends in the practice of social work vis-à-vis agency mission and vision statements; preparing and using case records and project process documentations, and more.

## 2. The Socio-cultural Context

As mentioned earlier, social work has been part of the Filipino culture even before the term was introduced. Social work was in the form of acts of helping people outside of one's own immediate family, and this has always been a part of the egalitarian *barangay* structure. (See Paradigm on *Pagtulong p.8*)

With our colonial experience, however, society became structured. Social work practitioners picked up an ideology from continuing analysis of social inequalities.

An integrated approach towards counter-consciousness formation represents an effort to "own" (no more as borrowed knowledge) professional work in the Philippines. The development perspectives that lend themselves toward nurturing the native professional come from (1) national aspirations (a composite of institutional vision and mission statements); (2) formation and transformation of people within the kinship and community, structures, as well as professional and national communities; (4) social network/support systems that provide safety nets to handle social inadequacies and contradictions; and (5) a redistributive model of creating and providing resources and services.

The country's history flows into the changing social work concepts, decentering the person and the problem, and bringing to light the political-economic and socio-cultural contexts of change and social transformation.

### 3. Data-base of Knowledge-building

The data-base underlies a framework that seeks to identify tensions within and among the professionals and their client's world views. This data-base consists of: perspectives in social development, social work education, professional continuing education, and the indigenous concepts of helping as social practices.

All these components are suggested to ensure not merely feasibility, but effectiveness as well of practice models.

The rooting objectives of dewesternization are basically to (1) contextualize social work within the country's development formation; and (2) to validate the effectiveness of social work interventions in scientific and cultural terms.

### Next Task: Reconceptualization

Accepted in the social work profession is the need for indigenization. But as in other disciplines, indigenization is perceived as the other face of foreign, and therefore it belongs to the same discourse. We know that the western theorist are just as happy as we are that social work of the third world is "indigenizing" and therefore expanding social work theorizing. Yet in this process, the western is still the dominant "other", and we, the "indigenizers." Rather, we are for instance owning social work when we define it as *teorya at praktika ng pagtulong sa gawaing panlipunan*, in our own terms.

As Western domination becomes a thing of the past in the next millennium, social work in the Philippines will gradually veer away from its social work "fathers" and "mothers", the process of practice. As a collective, professionals will be reflecting on their own experiences and will be increasingly self and native-conscious rather than other or west-conscious. So what if it takes a hundred years? The best is yet to come.





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**Data-banks:**

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### ***Endnotes:***

<sup>1</sup> In her book, *Social Work and Social Welfare: An Introduction*, 1981, Mendoza states that social welfare "practically denotes everything that man can do for the good of society, everything that organizes the social concerns through programs and activities undertaken by various agencies and institutions and that involves the contribution of many people with different competencies." P.2

Curiously, there is yet no satisfactory equivalent of the term "social functioning" in Filipino. This remains to be a "borrowed" term for us, and if so, does the term have to be "returned"?

Enriquez (1993): Every ethnic community has an informal indigenous psychology reflecting the people's knowledge, methods and practices." He starts the formation of a psychologist with the basic principles and roots to modern and indigenous psychology. In the process, he rewrites the discipline's history with the attempt to decolonize.

Discourse is defined as an inquiry into the nature and use of language. To understand the meaning of an utterance or a text, e.g., social work, indigenization, etc., requires more than knowing what it refers to. Discursive practices include definitions, concepts with which to analyze an object to delimit what can or can not be said about it, and to demarcate who can say it. Once publicized, utterances become public properties, and the interpretations are subject to the reader, no longer under the control of the author/speaker. (Adapted from Fowler, *Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, 1987)

With specific legislative materials to critically and periodically examine, a practitioners' discourse on profession-related social policy statements suggest another angle for studying local practice. This kind (of discourse) is for another time.